

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

Cathedral Church of St. -Paul,

ON SUNDAY, THE SEVENTEENTH OF APRIL, 1796.

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Cathedral Church of St. Paul,

ON SUNDAY, THE SEVENTEENTH OF APRIL, 1796.

25

17

694. K. 2.
117

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

Cathedral Church of St. Paul,

BEFORE THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD MAYOR,

THE

JUDGES,

ALDERMEN, SERJEANTS AT LAW,

SHERIFFS,

AND

CITY OFFICERS,

ON SUNDAY, THE SEVENTEENTH OF APRIL, 1796,

BEING THE

First Sunday in Easter Term.

BY THE REV^d THOMAS ROBERTS, A. M.

CHAPLAIN TO HIS LORDSHIP.

K

LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. WILSON, ST. PETER'S-HILL, DOCTORS'-COMMONS.

MDCCXCVI.

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

Cathedral Church of St. Paul,

BEFORE THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD MAYOR,

THE

JUDGES,

ALDERMEN, SERJEANTS AT LAW,

SHERIFFS,

AND

CITY OFFICERS,

OF LONDON, THE TWENTY-NINTH OF APRIL, 1796.

BEING THE

Fifth Sunday in Easter Term.

By the Rev. THOMAS ROBERTS, A.M.

CHAPLAIN TO HIS LORDSHIP

LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S, DOCTORS' COMMONS.

MDCCLXXXVI.

27

CURTIS, MAYOR.

*A Common Council holden in the Chamber of the Guildhall of the City of
London, on Thursday the 13th Day of October, 1796.*

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

THAT the Thanks of this Court be given to the Reverend THOMAS ROBERTS, Chaplain to the Right Honourable the LORD-MAYOR, for his excellent Sermons preached before his LORDSHIP, the JUDGES, ALDERMEN, SERJEANTS AT LAW, SHERIFFS, and CITY OFFICERS, at the *Cathedral Church of St. Paul*, on the *Seventeenth of April*, and the *Twenty-Ninth of May* last, being the *First Sundays in Easter and Trinity Terms*, and that he be desired to print the same, and cause a Copy thereof to be sent to the LORD MAYOR, JUDGES, ALDERMEN, SERJEANTS AT LAW, SHERIFFS, and CITY OFFICERS, and to the MEMBERS of this COURT.

R I X.

CURTIS, MARION

Marion Curtis was born in the town of...

She was the daughter of...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

29
TO THE
Right Honourable WILLIAM CURTIS,
LORD MAYOR,

THE
WORSHIPFUL THE ALDERMEN,

THE
RECORDER, THE SHERIFFS,

AND THE
COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LONDON,

THIS
S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE

Cathedral Church of St. Paul,

ON THE SEVENTEENTH OF APRIL, 1796,

AND PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

LONDON,
OCT. 28, 1796.

THE AUTHOR.

TO THE
Right Honourable WILLIAM CURTIS
LORD MAYOR.

THE
WORSHPITUL THE ALDERMEN,
THE
RECORDER, THE SHERIFFS,

AND THE
COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LONDON.

SERMON.

PREACHED IN THE
Cathedral Church of St. Paul,
ON THE SEVENTEENTH OF APRIL, 1796,
AND PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR OBEYIENT SERVANT
THE AUTHOR.
LONDON:
GODFREY ALLEN, 1796.

31

GENESIS, CHAP. XVIII. PART OF THE TWENTY FIFTH VERSE.

SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO RIGHT ?

IT has been remarked, with great truth and accuracy, that God has been pleased to submit three books to the perusal and observation of mankind—the Book of Scripture—the Book of Conscience—and the Book of Nature. The first contains the clear and positive declaration of his will, and displays his judgments and visitations—the second affords the innate testimony that man is an accountable creature—the third exhibits the most lively characters of the Deity, and of that order and regularity so conspicuous in the universe.

The Bible, or the Book of Holy Writ, contains a law and testimony to teach us our duty, as we are in covenant

C

with

with God—"I will put my law in their heart;" it contains statutes and commandments to enforce obedience to our heavenly Sovereign; it contains the awful fear of God and his judgments, to animate our zeal and diligence, and to make us walk in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless. In the Book of Genesis, it is recorded that the daring sins of a depraved and abandoned people, challenged the enquiry, and finally drew down the awful judgment of God. Previous, however, to the execution of the terrible sentence, God condescends to communicate his intention to Abraham, his chosen, faithful servant—"shall I hide from Abraham, "that thing which I do?" The judgments of a perfect Being must be attended with infinite justice and discernment, but mercy will nevertheless recommend caution and timely forbearance; God, therefore, declares—"he will go down, "and see whether they had done altogether, according to the "cry of it, which was come unto him; but if not, I will "know." Abraham, part of whose character is described by God himself,* as one "that would do justice and judgment," convinced of the heinous crime of that abandoned people, only presumes to intercede for the righteous, who might peradventure reside among them—"Wilt thou also, "O Lord,

* Genesis xviii. 19.

“ O Lord, destroy the righteous with the wicked ?” But reflecting, at the same moment, on the discriminating justice of God, he moderates his question by observing—“ that be
 “ far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous
 “ with the wicked ; that be far from thee ;” and satisfies his mind with this general observation and submissive acquiescence—“ shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?” A merciful God condescended to listen to every plea in favour of the righteous and innocent—“ peradventure ten righteous
 “ shall be found there, and God said, I will not destroy it
 “ for ten’s sake.” The event was that inflexible justice inflicted, exterminating destruction on that abandoned people—
 “ the Lord rained down fire and brimstone, he overthrew
 “ those cities, and all the plain, and the inhabitants of the
 “ cities, and that which grew on the ground.”*

If we seriously consult that divine book, remark the recorded instances of God’s judgments, and examine its various precepts, we shall readily join in the pious declaration of Abraham—“ shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?” It must be confessed that the most consummate art and design of the craftiest hypocrite cannot deceive the infinite wisdom
 of

* Genesis xix. 24, 25.

of God, or cause the least confusion in his infallible judgment. The all-seeing eye of God penetrates into the deep recesses of the heart, discovers all its intrigues and wanderings, and traces all its thoughts long before they are carried into execution. All persons and things appear to God in their genuine character, distinct and perfect; so that what is really evil, cannot in his judgment have the most distant appearance of being good; and what is intrinsically good, cannot be misrepresented as evil. God views all our thoughts and actions, like objects seen through a microscope, varied in all their shades and colours, or distorted with all their defects and deformities; so that his infinite perception and judgment are commensurate with the minuteness or magnitude of the object. That divine book informs us—"that God will
 "manifest the secret counsels of the heart." Did not the inward disposition, the internal purity of the heart come under consideration in the judgment of God, it might be productive of error and partiality, for though an habitual practice of evil is an infallible proof of an evil man, yet an external course of good and apparently virtuous actions is no such certain criterion, or testimony, of a good man; the reason is obvious, virtue may be counterfeited, but vice cannot; a designing, artful character, who can regulate his passions
 and

and command his inclinations, may assume an external and pharisaical disguise of piety and goodness ; may be temperate, chaste, and self-denying ; “ may give alms to be seen of men ; “ may pray, and that frequently,” suited to some particular purpose, and subservient to some worldly design, yet inwardly retain his vicious nature and depravity of heart ; but a sincere and strictly good man can never put on the mask of wickedness, enter into the abandoned paths of actual vice and blasphemy, and yet retain his good name and reputation ; because such a character would cease to be a counterfeit or assumed, but become reality. Man may be deceived, but God cannot. Every one will certainly be condemned by that “ Judge who must do right,” whose outward actions proclaim him to be evil ; neither can he be acquitted who does not unite with a holy life, a pure, honest, sincere, and upright heart.

Since God, our heavenly Judge, possesses such intuitive knowledge as to comprehend the most exact, discriminating, and impartial view of the outward and inward man, so his judgment is decided and infallible. No external respect, or worldly distinction, no fancied merit, or plausible pretext, can dazzle his all-seeing eye—no internal passion or prejudice,

no misplaced affection or partiality, can pervert the all-perfect judgment of God. The wealth of worlds can neither bribe him in our favour, or the malice of man prejudice him to our hurt; no specious pretences can justify a vicious and immoral course of life; no solemn hypocrisy supply the place of a sincere and honest heart; no public profession, exalted rank, or splendid abilities, can palliate or excuse private vices, or justify a constant repetition of depraved actions. In proportion to the extent of the opportunity we have of knowing our duty, the more culpable will be our neglect. The more exalted our situation in life, the more will it be remarked; for in a worldly, as well as moral sense—"unto whomsoever
 " much is *given*, shall much be required." The prevailing dispositions of our hearts, and the integrity and purity of our lives, whether we are faithful friends to God, sincere lovers of holiness, and the true disciples of a crucified Saviour, or the slaves of our passions and humours, "lovers of pleasure
 " more than lovers of God," in compliance with general custom, or from depravity of mind, will be examined and recorded by that Judge who must do right. Let us remember
 " the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than
 " any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder
 " of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a
 " discerner

“ discerner of the thoughts and intents of the hearts ; neither
 “ is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight ; but
 “ all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with
 “ whom we have to do.”*

The great forbearance and long-suffering of God, ought to excite our gratitude, rather than provoke his displeasure by a repetition of our vices. Let us not join in the sentiment, “ because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily ; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”† The sins of mankind are, no doubt, at this present time great and offensive ; but under the existing state and circumstances of the world, God, in his wisdom and counsel, secret from us, does not visibly inflict immediate punishment on the wicked, yet we have ample and convincing proof “ that his judgments are still in the earth.” God is pleased to leave the external forms of human policy, and the administration of national justice, to the wisdom and direction of man, founded, however, on the laws of immutable truth, justice, and mercy ; and though our Saviour declared “ his kingdom not to be of this world,” yet, in his human nature, submitted to the laws of man, and

* Hebrews xiv. 12, 13.

† Ecclesiastes viii. 11.

and has reserved to himself the final judgment “ when all
 “ shall appear before his judgment seat.”

The Scripture emphatically describes those who have the
 administration of justice upon earth, Kings, Judges, and Ma-
 gistrates, by the beautiful and figurative expression of “ shields
 “ of the earth belonging unto God.”* Shields to protect the
 rights of the upright from the fiery darts of the wicked.
 Shields to cover the miserable and oppressed. Shields to
 preserve inviolate “ to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute
 “ is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour
 “ to whom honour.”† Shields to defend God’s holy re-
 ligion and worship, from the scoff of infidels, and the de-
 clared enemies of Christianity—“ that God may be our God
 “ for ever and ever, and be our guide unto death.”‡

In addition to the revealed will of God in the Holy Scrip-
 tures, God has also placed within us the book of conscience,
 written in the heart of man—“ not with ink, but with the
 “ Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in
 “ fleshy tables of the heart.”§ This is a book the most il-
 literate

* Psalm xlvii. 9.

† Romans xiii. 7.

‡ Psalm xlviii. 14.

§ 2 Cor. iii. 3.

literate may understand, and yet is too often neglected and disregarded.

St. John alludes to the production of it hereafter—"I saw
 "the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books
 "were opened; and another book was opened, which is
 "the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those
 "things which were written in the books according to their
 "works."* Every man's heart, whether Jew or Gentile, must
 be impressed with this truth, that God is a witness to all our
 thoughts and actions, and that we are accountable creatures.
 From this secret testimony of conscience, from this inward
 conviction that God is acquainted with all our actions, arises
 that terror and remorse which are the inseparable companions
 of guilt. That such sentiments are innate in the heart of man,
 is evident from the behaviour and conduct of our first
 parents. When the sense of their recent guilt and disobedience
 operated powerfully on their minds, they fondly imagined
 they could hide themselves from the presence of their Creator.
 That very act evidently arose from the inward impulse of
 conscience, and plainly confessed them to be guilty and ac-

E

countable

* Rev. xx. 12.

countable creatures. What reason can be assigned why they should attempt to avoid the divine presence, "by hiding themselves among the trees of the garden," unless they were alarmed by remorse and shame, and convinced that God was an eye-witness to all their actions, and was well acquainted with their crime and disobedience? It must have originated from the distraction and terror which ever accompanies guilt and a wounded conscience.

Thus the wicked of the present age, conscious of their crimes, would fain hide themselves in the garden of infidelity, and shelter themselves under the deadly and dreary shade of Atheism. Such a weak subterfuge bespeaks terror of mind, and the awful fear of bringing their actions to the standard of truth and rational investigation. Times of barbarous triumph, are generally times of enthusiasm, rashness and infidelity—which recent experience confirms. Times of affliction and visitation are times of conviction and returning conscience. When Simeon was bound before his brethren, and the horrors of punishment alarmed him, conscience induced him to declare—"we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his
"foul,

“foul, when he besought us, and we would not hear;
 “therefore is this distress come upon us.”* May the same
 confession of guilt, and the awakening powers of conscience,
 make us and every other nation, implore the forgiveness of
 God, and induce mankind universally to cultivate peace, con-
 cord, forgiveness, love, truth, justice, and mercy!

The book of nature exhibits to us the most lively charac-
 ters and evidences of the Deity and his attributes, that he
 is a God of order, and therefore demands obedience. The
 most superficial observer must be convinced that order and
 government are the two main pillars which support and keep
 up this wonderful and well-constructed fabric, the natural
 world. Wherever we turn our eyes, we are encompassed
 with visible proof and self-evident demonstration. If we
 look up—“we find the heavens declare the glory of God,
 “and the firmament sheweth his handy work;” if we
 take a survey of the earth, we find the animal and vegetable
 kingdom under fixed and well-regulated laws—even the
 inanimate parts of nature are subject to certain rules and
 restrictions, the waves of the sea know their bounds,
 “fire and hail, snow and vapour, storm and tempest fulfil
 “his

* Genesis xlii. 21.

“ his word.” Without order, system and regularity in the natural world as well as the moral, all religion and traces of the Deity, would be utterly lost and annihilated. The natural debt we all owe to our Creator and Preserver, for the regular change of the seasons, the constant supply of the productions of the earth, and the various blessings arising from his bounty ought to make us exclaim—“ Lord, what
 “ is man that thou art thus mindful of him, or the son of
 “ man that thou thus regardest him !”

The revelation of God’s holy will, the responsibility of man, and gratitude for favours received, are essential principles in religion ; deny that God regards the ways of man, and you at one blow overthrow the glorious fabric of religion—remove responsibility from man, and you make him ferocious and profligate—argue that the operations of nature are the effects of chance and you break the well-compacted chain of natural causes and effects.

Since God has been pleased to grant us such opportunities of being instructed in our various duties and obligations, and written in such legible characters, we must subscribe to the sentiment of Abraham—“ that the Judge of all the earth
 “ must

“ must do right.” Let us, therefore, with Christian sincerity and humility, examine and prepare ourselves for that solemn, scrutinizing, and final judgment, “ when all must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”* In order to perform this important duty in the most effectual manner, we must take an impartial survey of all our actions. We must remove that mis-guiding principle, self-love, which, like a traiterous Judas, is apt to betray us with a kiss, and surrender us a prey to the worst of enemies. Experience will readily inform us how cheerfully we yield to the soft whispers and fascinating persuasions of self-love, and self-deception ; and how easily we satisfy our minds with the deceitful and misapplied comparison, “ by thanking God we are not as other men are ; extortioners, unjust, or adulterers.” We condemn the faults of others, but cannot perceive “ the beam that is in our own eye.” The charge to Abraham was, “ to walk before God and be perfect,” or, as it is in the margin, “ upright ;” intimating, that if perfection is not attainable by human nature, yet we may be “ upright,” by

F

candour,

candour, sincerity, humility, justice, mercy, temperance, and faith.

Let such a powerful sense of God's glorious majesty and infinite knowledge, with the awful contemplation of his unerring judgment, dwell on our minds, as the most effectual means of purifying and cleansing our hearts ; let our hearts be as free from the thoughts and suggestions of evil, as our lives are from the practice of it ; " beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God," " Let us have a conscience void of offence towards God " and towards man, and let us hold fast the profession " of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful who " has promised."

Let us give glory to God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, with praise and thanksgiving, both now and for evermore, AMEN.

F I N I S.

